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Religion and Latino Partisanship in the United States

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This article examines the interplay among religion, ethnicity, and the partisanship of Latinos in the U.S. Using pooled data from the 1990-2000 National Election Studies, we assess denominational affiliation and religious commitment as explanations of partisanship. We show that there is more religious diversity among Latinos than is usually acknowledged in studies of Latino politics and that the political importance of religion among Latinos has not been adequately assessed because variation beyond a Catholic/non-Catholic dichotomy has been ignored. We demonstrate that variation in Latino religious affiliation has important political implications.

Contemporary American politics is as competitive as at any time in history. As evidenced by recent elections, even small changes in partisan sympathies or political activity can have a profound impact on the balance of partisan power and accompanying policy outcomes. Given this tenuousness, it is instructive for students of politics to explore sources of partisan change in the U.S. electorate. The rising tide of Latinos seems poised to create such change.¹

The Latino population of the U.S. has grown dramatically in the past few decades, surpassing blacks as the largest minority group in the 2002 Current Population Survey. Electorally, Latinos comprised a larger proportion of voters in 2000 than in any previous election. Existing studies have focused on the low levels of participation and citizenship among Latinos, but the political importance of Latinos is increasing (Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Calvo and Rosenstone 1989; Diaz 1996; J. Garcia 1997; Hero and Campbell 1996; Hritzuk and Park 2000; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Verba et al. 1993). Since 1994, in fact, Latino participation in

elections has increased at almost the same rate as their growth in the population. Given the sheer number of Latinos as well as evidence of rising naturalization and political participation levels, more attention to Latino political behavior is appropriate in order to appreciate the nature and magnitude of their current and future influence on U.S. politics.

While several studies have explored the partisanship and issue attitudes of Latinos (Alvarez and Bedolla 2003; Cain and Kiewiet 1984; Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Coffin 2003; F. Garcia 1997; Kosmin and Keysar 1995; Welch and Sigelman 1993), this study focuses specifically on *religion* and partisanship. Our analysis seeks to understand the interplay between religion and ethnicity in politics and to assess the determinants of partisanship in an important minority. First we establish the theoretical underpinnings of our work by discussing how religion can influence Latino politics in the U.S. Second, we describe the religious composition of Latinos in the U.S. during the 1990s. Third, we analyze the connection between Latino religion and partisanship. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for partisan alignments in the U.S.

EXPLAINING LATINO PARTISANSHIP

Recently, scholars have conducted creative analyses to provide new analytical leverage on the formation of partisanship among Latinos (Alvarez and Bedolla 2003; Coffin 2003). But these studies do not diverge from earlier studies in at least one important respect—they give little attention to the influence of religion in Latino politics. Studies that do examine religion usually conceptualize it simply as a dichotomy between Catholic and not Catholic. Perhaps due in part to this simplified conceptualization, the literature on the political behavior of Latinos arrives at mixed conclusions as to the effect of religion. In a study comparing the participation of Anglos, African-Americans, and Latinos, Verba and his colleagues (1993) find that both religious affiliation and church attendance are important explanatory factors in understanding participation levels, particularly the low participation of Latinos. Kosmin and Keysar (1995) also find

¹ The term Latino will be used in this paper to refer to people who are immigrants or the descendants of immigrants from Spain or the former Spanish colonies in Central and South America and the Caribbean, as well as people who are descendants of residents of the parts of former Spanish colonies that are now part of the U.S. The term is used out of convenience, and its use is not meant to imply that a common "Latino" identity exists.

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support for the notion that religion is politically important among Latinos, suggesting that Protestants are more likely than Catholics to be Republican. On the other hand, Welch and Sigelman (1993) find few differences between Latinos of different religious backgrounds, and de la Garza, Falcon, and Garcia (1996) find no religious influence on the core values held by Mexican-Americans. Overall, we know little about the political implications of Latino religion.

The primary reason for this lack of knowledge is likely data limitations. Only a few data collections that focus on Latinos are available, most prominent among these being the Latino National Political Survey and a more recent study funded by the Pew and Kaiser foundations. These Latino data sources, however, make use of an outdated measure of religious affiliation that limits their usefulness for studying the connection between religion and politics.² No publicly available single data source that provides useful measures of both religion and politics includes enough Latino respondents to conduct convincing analysis. We overcome this problem by using National Election Studies (NES) data from 1990-2000. By pooling these years, we are able to examine nearly 1000 Latino respondents.³ With regard to religion, the NES has included a fairly comprehensive battery of religion measures since 1990. Thus, we make use of a source specifically designed to study neither Latinos nor religion, but one that provides more detailed information about both than any other publicly available source.

As we consider the mechanisms of religious impact, we base our analysis primarily on the theory that churches provide an important social context in which political information is exchanged (Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988). Different churches communicate different political ideas, and people affiliated with various kinds of churches are likely to adopt partisan attachments that are consistent with the messages received (from both religious elites and fellow parishioners). The type of church one attends is central to the contextual theory of religious influence, and is likely particularly

important among those in the process of learning about politics in a new country. However, religion is a multidimensional concept, and in the past two decades the religion and politics literature has begun to account for this multidimensionality more carefully by placing emphasis on two psychological facets of religion—theological beliefs and religious behaviors (Guth et al. 1995; Jelen 1991; Kellstedt et al. 1996; Layman 1997; Layman and Carmines 1997). While theories emphasizing psychological factors differ in important ways from the contextual conception of religious influence, we bring these two approaches together in our analysis.

More specifically, we hypothesize that certain religious behaviors and beliefs will condition the effect of political information that flows to individuals in churches. At the very minimum, people must attend religious services to be exposed to the political messages that are presented. Other forms of religious behavior such as prayer and bible reading might also make individuals more likely to adopt political views communicated in a religious context. In addition, those who evidence a willingness to accept religious doctrine on faith should be more likely to accept and be influenced by political messages disseminated in churches. In sum, we hypothesize that high (or low) levels of religious orthodoxy and activity will magnify (or diminish) the effect of political messages delivered in the context of a church.

To operationalize the concepts discussed above ideally we would observe the political messages exchanged in churches. Individual-level analysis could then be conducted to determine whether the partisanship of Latinos in varying church contexts responds predictably to differences in political messages and to assess whether this response is conditioned by individual variation in religious behaviors and beliefs. While the NES does not provide detailed data about the political messages Latinos receive in churches, it does provide specific information about denominational affiliation (Leege, Wald, and Kellstedt 1990). Based on this information, we categorize Latinos according to the religious tradition (or denominational family) of which they are a part (Kellstedt et al. 1996). Using religious tradition as a proxy for church context makes the imperfect assumption that meaningful variation in political messages exists across, but not within, religious traditions. This is an obvious source of measurement error that, if serious enough, will attenuate the relationship between religious affiliation and partisanship. Finally, we operationalize the concepts of religious belief and behavior by combining them in a measure of religious commitment that includes attendance of religious services, prayer, bible reading, the importance of religion, biblical inerrancy, and affiliation with a church.

LATINO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION IN THE U.S.

Some might be inclined to dismiss the above discussion based on the assumption that there is little if any religious variation in the Latino population. After all, it is a common belief that the overwhelming majority of Latinos are Catholic. Without religious variation there would be little effect of

² These Latino-specific surveys measure religious identification using questions that produce invalid and unreliable results because they do not effectively probe the specific church or denominational affiliation of each respondent. For a complete discussion of the weaknesses of this type of measure, see Kellstedt et al. (1996) and Leege, Wald, and Kellstedt (1990).

³ Since some of these surveys were panel studies, only those respondents selected as part of the cross-sectional study for each survey are examined. The main difference between the NES data and sources specifically designed to study Latinos is that the NES interviews respondents only in English (except in 1992) while other surveys also offer interviews in Spanish. Data collection funded by the Pew and Kaiser foundation in 2002, for example, shows some predictable demographic differences as compared to the data we use. The NES sample is marginally more educated, female, and wealthy. The two datasets are almost identical, however, in terms of age. Thus, throughout the analysis the results are, strictly speaking, only generalized to the English-speaking portion of the Latino population even though this caveat is not repeatedly offered in the paper. Even so, these Latinos are particularly important for politics because they are more politically active, and we have no reason to believe that the relationships between religion and politics will differ among Spanish speakers compared to those who speak at least some English.

≡ TABLE 1
RELIGIOUS VARIATION AMONG LATINOS

Religious Tradition	a. Ethnicity					
	All Latinos	Mexicans	Cubans	Puerto Ricans	Other Latinos	Non-Latinos
Evangelical	23%	22%	27%	27%	23%	28%
Mainline Protestant	7%	7%	3%	4%	7%	19%
Roman Catholic	56%	59%	63%	58%	53%	26%
Other	4%	4%	7%	3%	5%	10%
Secular	9%	8%	0%	9%	12%	17%
N	951	428	30	109	384	

Religious Tradition	b. Time in U.S.		
	Born and Raised Abroad	Raised Abroad and in U.S.	Born and Raised in U.S.
Evangelical	19%	23%	26%
Mainline Protestant	4%	7%	8%
Roman Catholic	61%	55%	54%
Other	5%	5%	4%
Secular	11%	10%	8%
N	241	312	398

religion on partisanship or other political attitudes and behavior. If this view were correct it would matter little how previous studies of Latino politics have accounted for religion. A dichotomous measure would be more than adequate.

However, the stereotype that the Latino population is overwhelmingly and immutably Catholic is inaccurate and misleading. While scholars of American religion have become aware of declining attachment to Catholicism among Latinos (Greeley 1994), political scientists have paid little attention to this phenomenon. Previous studies suggest that approximately three-quarters of Latinos were affiliated with the Catholic Church during the 1980s, declining from over 80% in earlier decades (Greeley 1994; Hunt 1998). Table 1a indicates a further decline in Latino affiliation with the Catholic Church, with 44 percent of Latinos identifying as non-Catholics during the 1990s. While non-Catholic Latinos are mostly evangelical Protestants, our data indicate that an appreciable percentage are either mainline Protestant or have no religious affiliation. Clearly, religion is not a constant factor among Latinos.

The remaining gap between Latinos and the rest of the population raises the possibility of further shifts away from Catholicism. One specific piece of evidence suggests that additional religious change among Latinos is not just possible, but probable. Table 1b gives an indirect indication that much of the shift away from Catholicism occurs after immigration to the U.S.⁴ Those born and raised outside the U.S. are much

more Catholic than those born and raised in the U.S. This indicates that as Latinos spend more time in the U.S. they become even more likely to leave their traditional Catholic roots and embrace other religious traditions. But are there political implications for these apparent religious changes?

RELIGION AND PARTISANSHIP IN THE LATINO POPULATION

We begin to answer this question by examining the relationship between denominational affiliation and partisan identification. When we examine all of the Latinos in our sample (Table 2a), we see that Roman Catholics are the most strongly Democratic, with 65 percent reporting attachment to the Democratic Party. The other religious traditions support Democrats less, but to varying degrees. Over half of evangelical Protestants and of those not affiliated with a church express support for the Democratic Party, but fewer than 40 percent of mainline Protestants identify as Democrats. This appears to indicate that the influence of religious tradition among Latinos is different than in the non-Latino population. Evangelicals identify most strongly with the Republican Party among non-Latinos, and the unaffiliated tend to be Democrats. But here we see that evangelicals and the unaffiliated are fairly similar, with mainline Protestants being the most distinctive in their partisan attachments. However, evangelicals are much lower in social economic status than the other traditions, so the partisan differences between evangelicals and other groups may be understated in this bivariate relationship.

Given that Latinos come from different cultural (and political) backgrounds depending on their country of origin, we examine the association between religious tradition and

⁴ A more direct measure would be the time spent in the U.S. or immigration status, but these measures are not available. Thus, as a proxy we combine the respondent's birthplace with where the respondent spent most of their time as a child.

≡ TABLE 2
RELIGION AND LATINO PARTISANSHIP

Party ID	Religious Tradition					
	Evangelical	Mainline	Catholic	Other	Secular	All
a. <i>All Latinos</i>						
Democrat	56%	37%	65%	50%	56%	60%
Independent	9%	21%	21%	33%	20%	13%
Republican	34%	42%	24%	18%	24%	27%
N	218	62	534	40	89	943
b. <i>Cubans</i>						
Democrat	25%	0%	37%	—	0%	30%
Republican	75%	100%	53%	—	100%	63%
N	8	1	19	0	2	30
c. <i>Mexicans</i>						
Democrat	64%	41%	69%	56%	59%	65%
Republican	26%	45%	20%	13%	21%	21%
N	94	29	251	16	34	424
d. <i>Puerto Ricans</i>						
Democrat	83%	75%	61%	67%	70%	69%
Republican	14%	0%	21%	0%	10%	17%
N	29	4	62	3	10	108
e. <i>Others</i>						
Democrat	43%	29%	64%	47%	51%	54%
Republican	47%	43%	25%	16%	29%	31%
N	87	28	202	19	45	381
f. <i>Born and Raised Abroad</i>						
Democrat	46%	70%	62%	36%	64%	58%
Republican	46%	30%	28%	36%	16%	31%
N	46	10	148	11	25	240
g. <i>Raised Abroad and in U.S.</i>						
Democrat	63%	52%	61%	63%	55%	61%
Republican	31%	29%	27%	13%	29%	28%
N	70	21	171	16	31	309
h. <i>Born and Raised in U.S.</i>						
Democrat	57%	16%	70%	46%	52%	60%
Republican	31%	55%	17%	8%	24%	24%
N	102	31	215	13	33	394

Note: Cell entries are column percentages. Party identifiers include those that explicitly identify or “lean” toward one of the parties. Columns do not add to 100 percent because “Independent” is a residual category that was not included to conserve space in the subgroup analysis.

partisan identification for ethnic subgroups in the next four parts of the table. While the sample sizes for these subgroups are quite small, we can get some sense of whether the general relationship between denominational family and partisanship is similar among Latinos from different countries of origin. The results presented in parts b, c, d, and e of Table 2 are somewhat surprising. The relationship between religion and partisanship is similar among Mexicans, Cubans, and other Latinos; but is reversed among Puerto Ricans. Smaller variations also exist among the other

three ethnic categories, with the partisan differences across religious tradition largest among “other Latinos” and smallest among Latinos originating from Mexico.

We are also curious whether the time that an individual has spent in the U.S. influences the association between denominational affiliation and partisanship. The last three parts of Table 2 show substantial differences in partisan affiliation across religious traditions among Latinos who are presumably the most recent immigrants (those born and raised abroad). Partisan variation across religious tradition is

also substantial among those who were born and raised in the U.S. However, the relationship is minimal in the middle category which is comprised of Latinos who spent some time in the U.S. and some time abroad as a child. Given the bivariate nature of these subgroup analyses, we do not go into a more detailed discussion of the results presented so far. However, these results should be kept in mind as they motivate a portion of the more rigorous multivariate analysis in the next section.

Multivariate Analysis of Religion and Partisanship

The dependent variable in this analysis is the familiar NES measure of partisanship that assesses both the strength and direction of partisan affiliation. This seven-point scale ranges from strong Democrat (coded 1) to strong Republican (coded 7), and we utilize standard OLS regression to produce the reported results.⁵ In addition to religion, controls are included for respondents' place of birth and childhood, country of origin, sex, age, income, education, ideology, and egalitarianism. Controlling for these factors is important, but it leads to a loss of cases due to missing data. Given the small sample and the accompanying importance of each and every case, we use the AMELIA multiple imputation procedure developed by King, et al. (2001) to deal with this issue.⁶

We present the results of two models of Latino partisanship in Table 3. The first column analyzes religion in a manner that is consistent with many previous studies of Latino politics. In this model, we examine the influence of affiliation with a non-Catholic church (or no church at all) compared to affiliation with the Catholic Church. Even using this rudimentary and oversimplified conceptualization of Latino denominational affiliation, we see that religion influences Latino partisanship. Specifically, non-Catholics are much more likely to be Republicans than those affiliated with Catholicism. However, this simple conceptualization of religious affiliation masks some interesting nuances.

⁵ A dependent variable with seven ordered categories can usually be analyzed with OLS regression. However, we also entertained models which analyzed party identification in three categories (Democrat, Independent, and Republican). We applied both ordered and multinomial logit estimation procedures and found no substantive differences in the results. Since the interpretation of OLS is more straightforward, we report only these results.

⁶ Our measures of religion have only a few missing cases. The worst case is ideology, where more than a third of the sample failed to provide a useful response. This likely identifies the limited utility of the usual conception of ideology in the Latino population. With so many missing cases for ideology, limiting the regression analysis to those with valid responses for ideology would drastically overstate the importance of ideology and understate the importance of variables with fewer missing cases. In order to retain cases in a manner that allows for correct parameter estimates, we have utilized Honaker, et al.'s (2000) AMELIA application to perform a multiple imputation procedure. This procedure makes use of information from all the variables in our analysis plus a few variables not included in the model to create five data sets with missing values imputed. The reported parameter estimates are averaged across the five imputed data sets. Further details of this type of imputation can be found in King et al. (2001).

The first model has at least two shortcomings. First, it does not account for religious variation beyond a Catholic/non-Catholic dichotomy. Second, it takes no account of religious behavior or beliefs. We correct both of these problems in a second model that uses the more detailed measure of denominational affiliation used throughout the bivariate analyses above. We also add a measure of religious commitment that provides information about each respondent's level of religious activity and doctrinal orthodoxy. While the effect of religious commitment on its own may provide important information, we are theoretically more concerned with how religious commitment conditions the influence of denominational affiliation on Latino partisanship. Thus, we utilize interaction terms between religious commitment and denominational family to account for the possibility that higher (lower) levels of religious commitment augment (diminish) the effect of religious affiliation. Also, in order to incorporate the insights gleaned from the earlier bivariate analysis, we add interaction terms between the religious variables and country of origin and time spent in the U.S. These interaction terms allow a multivariate assessment of how the effect of religion varies across population subgroups.

The second column of Table 3 reports the results of this model. The first conclusion is that a dichotomous view of Latino religion is inappropriate, and a comprehensive understanding of the political implications of religion cannot be obtained without the more sophisticated measurement of religious affiliation utilized in this analysis. The effect of affiliation with a non-Catholic tradition varies depending on the specific non-Catholic affiliation. Evangelicals and, especially, mainline Protestants are much less Democratic in their partisan identification. In fact, affiliation with a mainline Protestant church as opposed to the Catholic Church produces, on average, a shift of almost a full point on the partisanship scale (with religious commitment at its mean level). Respondents with no religious affiliation, however, are not significantly different from Catholics and may be more Democratic. So movement away from Catholicism has different political implications depending on the exact nature of the change. Secondly, while we see that most of the interactions between religious tradition and religious commitment are in the expected direction, their lack of significance prevents a conclusion that religious commitment conditions the effect of religious tradition in the hypothesized manner. One explanation for this could be that the religious behavior and belief measures do not effectively capture the type of connection to the church that would condition the flow of information to the congregant. A second possibility is that the hypotheses regarding the conditional effects of religious context are correct but cannot be confirmed with the sample size available.

The final model in Table 3 also tests variation in the effect of religion across subgroups of the Latino population. Our use of interaction terms is analogous to conducting subgroup regression analysis (Friedrich 1982). While using interaction terms to compute subgroup effects prevents the

≡ TABLE 3
RELIGION AND PARTISANSHIP AMONG LATINOS IN THE U.S.

Independent Variables	Partisanship (Republican +)			
	(a)		(b)	
Religion				
Non-Catholic	.12**	(.04)		
Evangelical			.36*	(.17)
Mainline			.75**	(.26)
Other			.25	(.31)
Unaffiliated			-.74	(.45)
Religious Commitment			-.17**	(.05)
Tradition-Commitment Interactions				
Evangelical * Commitment			.09	(.11)
Mainline * Commitment			.04	(.19)
Other * Commitment			.26	(.19)
Unaffiliated * Commitment			-.31	(.17)
Religious Tradition Interactions				
Evangelical * Puerto Rican			-.63	(.47)
Evangelical * Cuban			.95	(.83)
Evangelical * Other Latino			.69*	(.33)
Mainline * Puerto Rican			-1.21	(1.09)
Mainline * Cuban			.46	(1.87)
Mainline * Other Latino			-.25	(.50)
Other * Puerto Rican			-1.09	(1.15)
Other * Cuban			2.39	(1.56)
Other * Other Latino			.07	(.66)
Unaffiliated * Puerto Rican			-.31	(.82)
Unaffiliated * Cuban			n.a.	
Unaffiliated * Other			-.19	(.52)
Evangelical * Raised in U.S.			.37	(.35)
Evangelical * Raised Abroad			.50	(.40)
Mainline * Raised in U.S.			1.42*	(.58)
Mainline * Raised Abroad			-.26	(.74)
Other * Raised in U.S.			.31	(.77)
Other * Raised Abroad			.01	(.82)
Unaffiliated * Raised in U.S.			.57	(.57)
Unaffiliated * Raised Abroad			.04	(.61)
Religious Commitment Interactions				
Commitment * Puerto Rican			.09	(.15)
Commitment * Cuban			-.35	(.27)
Commitment * Other Latino			-.07	(.10)
Commitment * Raised in U.S.			.16	(.11)
Commitment * Raised Abroad			.14	(.12)
Demographic and Political Factors				
Born and Raised Abroad	.05	(.16)	.07	(.16)
Born and Raised in U.S.	-.10	(.14)	-.15	(.14)
Puerto Rican	-.20	(.20)	-.21	(.20)
Cuban	1.57**	(.35)	1.44**	(.35)
Other Latino	.20	(.13)	.15	(.13)
Female	.10	(.12)	.09	(.12)
Age	-.02**	(.00)	-.02**	(.00)
Income Percentile	.01	(.00)	.00	(.00)
Years of Education	.01	(.03)	-.00	(.03)

TABLE 3 (continued)

Independent Variables	Partisanship (Republican +)			
	(a)		(b)	
Ideology (Conservative +)	.33**	(.06)	.32**	(.06)
Egalitarianism	-.07	(.09)	-.07	(.09)
Constant	2.25**	(.47)	2.44**	(.48)
R ²	.12		.18	
Adj. R ²	.11		.14	
Root MSE	1.77		1.74	
N	951		951	

Note: Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Catholic is the reference category for religious tradition, Mexican is the reference category for ethnicity, and some time abroad as child is the reference category for time spent in the U.S.

Significance levels: * < .05; ** < .01, 2-tailed tests

need to run separate regression models within each subgroup of interest, the difficulty of obtaining statistical significance in small subgroups remains. Probably in large part because of this, the only statistically discernable difference in the effect of religion across Latino subgroups is that the effect of evangelicalism among other Latinos is larger than for Mexicans (the reference group). Similarly, the effect of religion generally does not vary between Latinos born in the U.S. versus those born abroad, with the exception that the influence of mainline Protestantism is augmented for those born in the U.S.

The Electoral Importance of Religion and Politics

The analysis to this point suggests that recent changes in the religious composition of the Latino population have likely had consequences for the partisanship of the Latino population. Partisanship, though extremely important, does not directly determine election outcomes and the policies these outcomes produce. Partisan change in conjunction with electoral participation is what really matters. Specifically, the political importance of the religious changes that have occurred in the Latino population could be reduced if these same religious changes retard electoral participation. For example, the electoral benefits to Republicans of shifts toward evangelicalism would be minimized if evangelicals fail to participate in elections.

In order to address this possibility, we present a simple bivariate analysis of religious tradition and electoral participation in Table 4. We see that evangelical Latinos are registered to vote and report voting in elections at nearly the same rate as Catholics. In addition, mainline Protestants are substantially more likely than Catholics to participate in elections. Together, these results support the conclusion that documented shifts from Catholicism to either mainline or evangelical Protestantism have current electoral importance, with such shifts benefiting the Republican Party. Those not affiliated with a church or denomination are the least likely to participate in elections. Recalling that the non-affiliated are likely a bit more Democratic than Catholics,

this means that the one religious shift that could help the Democratic Party is also the most strongly moderated by a lack of participation.

LATINOS, RELIGION, AND PARTISANSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

In this article we have shown that religious changes previously documented among Latinos have continued through the 1990s. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Latinos are diverse religiously. More Latinos than ever are not Catholic and the non-Catholic category exhibits considerable religious and political variation. The data show that an appreciable percentage of Latinos are evangelical or mainline Protestants, or have no religious affiliation. More important, these religious differences matter politically. Latinos affiliated with denominations of various religious traditions diverge in their partisan affiliations. These variations are not only present in bivariate analyses, but also persist as significant predictors when controlling for a variety of other characteristics. More specifically, we have found that affiliation with evangelical and, especially, mainline Protestant denominations increases identification with the Republican party. On the other hand, those who affiliate with no church or denomination are likely stronger Democrats than even Roman Catholics when demographic and political controls are applied.

While we do not have time-series data with which we can explicitly test dynamic hypotheses, our results also provide some leverage on the prospects for future partisan alignments among Latinos. In sum, we see two important patterns among Latinos that are central to the future of American politics. The first relates to the size of the Latino population—it has been growing and will continue to do so for many years to come. Furthermore, the geographical distribution of Latinos serves to emphasize their political importance. While Latinos are not as geographically concentrated as they once were, the largest Latino populations exist in some of the most electorally important states such as Texas, Florida, California, New York, and Illinois.

≡ TABLE 4
RELIGION AND LATINO ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

Electoral Participation	Religious Tradition					All
	Evangelical	Mainline	Catholic	Other	Unaffiliated	
Registered to Vote	70%	81%	73%	61%	67%	71%
Reported Voting	47%	65%	52%	50%	41%	50%
N	198	51	483	38	85	855

Traditionally, the increasing proportion of Latinos, a disadvantaged immigrant group, has been seen as a foundation for Democratic Party success. While Latinos have been disengaged from politics in the past, the current partisan alignment among this ethnic group certainly favors Democrats as the Latino population grows and becomes more politically active. There is a second pattern, however, that might serve to moderate this Democratic advantage. Namely, there has been and will likely continue to be a decline in Catholicism among Latinos in the U.S. This religious change could serve to diminish Latino identification with the Democratic party if increasing numbers of Latinos move to evangelical and mainline Protestant churches.

APPENDIX: VARIABLES

Variable numbers refer to NES Cumulative File. Variables not available in the cumulative file were merged with the cumulative file from individual NES studies. **Religious Tradition:** Based on VCF0152. Our categorization of denominations is borrowed largely from Kellstedt et al. (1996). The details are available from the authors upon request. **Religious Commitment:** A point is added to the scale for each of the following: attend church at least once or twice a month (VCF0130), pray once a day or more (available in individual NES surveys), read bible at least a few times a week (available in individual NES surveys), religion provides at least some guidance to one's life (VCF0847), views Bible as God's literal word (VCF0850), is affiliated with a religious tradition. Range 0 to 6. Mean = 3.54. N = 951. **Ethnicity:** Based on VCF0109 (Ethnicity) and VCF0142 (Birthplace). **Time in U.S.:** Combination of respondent's place of birth (VCF0142) and where the respondent grew up (VCF0132). Three categories: (1) Born and grew up outside the U.S. (Puerto Rico not part of the U.S. for this purpose), (2) Either born or brought up in the U.S., (3) Both born and grew up in the U.S. **Conservatism:** VCF0803. 1 = extremely liberal, 7 = extremely conservative. Mean = 4.24, N = 583. **Egalitarianism:** Factor based combination of the following: VCF9017 (should worry less about equality), VCF9016 (ok if some have more equal chance), and VCF9014 (too far in pushing equal rights). Mean = 0, N = 622. **Partisanship:** VCF0301. 1=Strong Democrat, 7=Strong Republican. Mean = 3.28, N = 943. **Female:** VCF0104. 0 = Male, 1 = Female. Mean = .56, N = 951.

Age: VCF0101. Mean = 40, N = 941. **Income:** VCF0114. Income quintile. Mean = 2.58, N = 876. **Education:** VCF0140. Ranges from less than eight grades to advanced degrees. Recoded to approximate years in school. Mean = 12.8, N = 942.

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